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Another girl



She was three. No news account mentioned her name. Attending physicians said she died from tear gas.

Occupation forces' spokesmen disagreed, claiming no proof because her small body had not been submitted to an autopsy. They sought to plant the suspicion the family wanted to avoid an official cause.

In fact, the parents' religion commands burial before the next sundown after death. The rule is scrupulously followed in West Bank villages. Only "sophisticated" city Muslims seek the exceptions so their dearly beloved can receive a proper send-off.

In any event, occupation authorities could have seized the body. They have shown themselves as men with little regard for the niceties when it comes to dealing with the subject population. Inevitably, the conclusion must be formed that the authorities had no desire to test the physicians' diagnosis.

In fact, as the Palestinian uprising reaches its seventh month, amid Israeli government cries it's all but over, the death of one three-year-old girl counts for little. She simply joins the other small children and babies caught in the crunch of the suppression.

A nine-month-old lost an eye on America's Memorial Day holiday when her mother attempted to prevent soldiers from taking away an uncle. Of course, the mother's injuries were more severe. This is from the official account, which came without apology.

No effort was made to portray the "wanted" man as a serious threat to Israeli life or property. He may have been fingered as a rock-thrower by an informant who could have been mistaken.

On mere whispers, men and boys have been shunted off to brand-new concentration camps in the Negev Desert, which is forbidden to most Israelis, and all Palestinians and neutral observers, because of the nuclear facility at Dimona. All other prisons reached overflow in the uprising's first weeks.

Perhaps as many as 20,000 Arabs, Christian and Muslim are ringed in by barbed wire and machine guns in the middle of the desert. As you expect, the days are sweltering hot, and there is no relief beneath the inadequate tents and corrugated roofs of the few shacks. Nights are even worse. I cannot begin to describe the bone-chilling cold that comes with sunsets in Middle Eastern

deserts.

The Israelis protest that no more than 5,000 reside in their Negev "guest facilities." They make no claim the prisoners received trials or any other due process. Instead, they cite authority from the Holy Land's previous occupying power.

In their final days in Palestine, the British drew up a law, neat and proper, permitting them without showing cause to hold anyone for six-months detention, in their failing effort to subdue terrorists. Men in current Israeli power, including Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir, were the targets of that law. They were bombing and shooting other Jews, as well as Arab and British citizens.

At the time, the detentions without trial were cited as "proof" the English were continuing the Nazi persecutions. However reluctantly, the previous occupation power maintained some semblance of "open inspection" for its

camps to the United Nations and the International Red Cross.

Furthermore, at its most repressive, London did not countenance the continuing random killing and maiming of babies and small children, as does the government which now rules Jerusalem.

Can you imagine the howlings if the English would have attempted to flick off charges that their tear gas had killed a small girl? How would the world have reacted to the latest in a string of infant mutilations, had the nine-month-old been blinded by a rubber bullet fired by a man from Liverpool?

The Israeli tear gas, not incidentally, is supplied by the United States. Tuesday's *Washington Post* printed photographs which showed the gas casings and their English language instructions.

In the eyes of the civilized world, the gas is but one example of how Americans are the Israelis' accomplices in their crimes against Palestinians' rights as human beings, including the killing and maiming of babies.

Our guilt increases each time Washington vetoes the otherwise unanimous vote, including close allies Britain and France, on UN's Security Council resolutions concerning the Palestinians.

I claim no exemption from the

charges. My writing on their behalf would not — nor should it — grant me innocence before the parents of the three-year-old. These columns have become empty protests in my own soul.

Therefore, Sharon and I have "adopted" a Palestinian child. We have Rihab's picture, taken in her school uniform: a cardigan, jumper and tights which sag slightly at the knees. She has a sweet face, dominated by large brown eyes that cannot see.

Our new "daughter" is blind. She lived her first nine years in a primitive West Bank village called Qabatia. There are eight brothers and sisters.

The child received no medical treatment, despite the fact the occupation authorities deduct 30 percent of her laborer-father's pay for social and welfare services.

When taken in by East Jerusalem's National Society for the Visually Handicapped last October, Rihab could neither walk nor climb stairs. Of course, she had never been to school.

The society's director, Helena Shehaden, a Greek Orthodox Christian, notes the little girl was "terribly frightened." In a few months, we will receive the first of our semi-annual reports on our Palestinian daughter's progress. One day, of course, Sharon and I would like to visit the child — God willing.

In the sordid mess Washington makes of America's presence in the Middle East, Rihab is not the Meachums' ticket to redemption. But sending money each month for the little girl's care does represent a contribution, however small, to restoring our nation's good name in the world. It provides a slender link of humanity to her people who suffer for their place of birth and their religion — the very excuses Hitler used to build his death camps.

In fact, when I look on Rihab's sweet face, I am reminded very much of the famous photograph of Anne Frank. Those who doubt the resemblance are invited to see for themselves.